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ABSTRACT

A college-high school-business partnership was developed in Maryland between Morgan State University (an historically black institution), Lake Clifton/Eastern high school (a predominantly black high school), and local businessmen representing the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) in an effort to begin preparing high school ninth graders for college. Summer sessions each year brought a core of students to Morgan State for classes in areas such as English, math, and computer science. Students learned what living in a dorm was like, had the benefit of career development counseling, and attended field trips across Maryland to participate in activities they would otherwise never consider. Additionally, tutorial sessions were conducted by Morgan State to provide the students with all the information that might be needed or expected for college admission. Another strategy, put in place in the fall of senior year, was having a young professor from Morgan State come to the high school to teach a freshman orientation course that included among other topics, techniques in note taking, what plagiarism means, and how to apply for financial aid. Parent workshops and faculty in-service classes were also developed to support the program. Communication and social skills were taught through attorneys from a local firm. It is concluded that the most important aspect of the college-school-business partnership is showing students that there are people who will stand behind them in achieving their dreams through higher education. (GLR)

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When K through 12 Is Not Enough: Preparing At-Risk Highschoolers for College

As the first presentor on this panel, my job this afternoon is to establish an overview of the college-school partnership between an historically black institution, Morgan State University, and a predominantly black high school, Lake Clifton/Eastern, in Baltimore. Initiated by the Baltimore City Schools in a 1985 "memorandum of interest" that suggested college-school meetings to exchange ideas, the partnership evolved in the late 80s and is now in the 90s a model program for troubled urban school districts and for colleges that believe in active outreach efforts. Perhaps the entire project would not have gone further than curriculum reviews done by Morgan chairpersons or a day on the campus for 100 students if it had not been for a more specific "Educational Opportunity Program" (EOP) that began in 1986, when Executives Unlimited--a voluntary group of businessmen--gathered and contributed $5000 toward college expenses for each of the fifty-four ninth graders in this special program. Thus EOP became the vehicle for a triple partnership (Morgan State, Lake Clifton/Eastern, and the businessmen) that aimed to help these ninth graders not only to stay in school, but to succeed in a college prep curriculum and the SATs, and then finally to go on to college.

The ninth graders are now seniors preparing for graduation in June. The dreams they carry may be hard to measure, but in

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determined to prove that it is never too late for high school students if the right combination of strategies is found. Because these students come from a community with virtually no history of higher education and few high school graduates, because the students tend to live in single parent homes or with members of the extended famile, and because they had a catalog of attendance and truancy problems, preparing the target group for college was more than a challenge.

On the whole, what we found was that we were creating strategies as we went along and could see a need or a problem. The teachers who were on the line five days a week throughout the academic year were, of course, asked to do the hardest work, whether that work was complicated by fights in the cafeteria or teenage pregnancies.

From the Morgan side of the partnership, perhaps the most important strategy we developed was a four-year summer residential enrichment program designed to guide those students who were able to attend toward higher education. For six weeks each summer, Morgan brought to campus a core of students for classes in science, math, English, humanities, foreign language, and computer science that were tailored to their age, grade level, and needs.

For the first two summers, Morgan squeezed its own budget and managed to pay for the program, but the last two summers are now being covered by a College-School Partners Grant from the Metropolitan Life Foundation. This $75,000 grant is vital to the program, but perhaps more important was the sense of recognition

for all involved, because Metropolitan considers this a model program which placed first in its national competition for funds. As the summers have gone by, different students learned what living in a dorm is like and had the benefit of career development and counseling sessions, as well as field trips across the state to participate in activities they would otherwise never consider. Whether it was a day at the Maryland Science Center or the Johns Hopkins University Advanced Physics Laboratory, the experiences represented a step beyond the norm for the EOP student. In the summer of 1990, the situation will change substantially, however. When the Lake Clifton students come to us, they will be high school graduates. Hence, we are planning one of two options for them. Depending on their SAT scores and their entering placement tests, the EOP graduates will be placed in either regular English Composition 101 and Math 109 courses for their first six credits or in our Freshman Studies Program in English, reading, math, which are developmental courses that meet more frequently, but still allow the student to earn college credits.

Although we have been and still are involved in the summer session component of the partnership, we have always understood that summer sessions were not enough for our share of the project. We needed to reach the students during the regular school year also. Thus, for these students who expect to go to college but do not always perceive what is needed to get there or what is expected once they matriculate, Morgan structured tutorial sessions into the EOP student's schedule twice a week. The tutors are our own

students, who can act as role models and share stories about college that the high school student will listen to. They have also accompanied the students to their Saturday SAT prep classes to determine what individual lessons they can add to the regimen during the week. Another strategy that was put into place at the request of the Lake Clifton coordinator is the Book of the Semester Program, designed to improve reading skills during this last semester of their time at the high school. With money budgeted in the Metropolitan grant, the high school has been able to buy several sets of historically important novels that are being covered in EOP classes this semester, but which shall remain behind after June to be used in regular English classes for other students.

One of the most profitable strategies, however, was put in place in the fall of senior year. It consisted of having a young and rather dynamic professor from Morgan teach a Freshman Orientation course for one credit on Saturday mornings at the high school. In that course, Karen Barnes (who also works as an admissions counselor at the university) taught everything from notetaking techniques to what plagiarism is to how to apply for financial aid to values and priorities needed by the successful college student. Perhaps the most valuable lesson had to do with the scholarship money, showing the students that $5,000 is only a start and that they will need financial aid, or scholarships from a college, or jobs to pay the rest of the expenses. Strategies such as these, plus invitations to events on our campus, ranging from our

Matriculation Convocation to special seminars given by African-American authors, are efforts to introduce students without natural community or family college role models to the wider culture of college and to show them how to function within that milieu.

It did not take long to realize that partnership strategies should not focus on the student alone. Hence, Morgan faculty members have given workshops to encourage EOP parents to support the program and in-service classes for the faculty. When the program first started, we would not have guessed that Ron Bloom from our School of Education and Urban Studies would have to work with the problems he faced in a workshop for parents in the fall of senior year. He needed to address their fears about losing their children to college. Now that the dream is so close for these students, parents and girl friends and boy friends are not so sure about the whole idea.

It would be accurate to say that the nature of the problems for these students appears to change as they grow and progress through the four-year program developed by the partners. It was important, therefore, for us to design some graduate courses in education and to offer fellowships for teachers at Lake Clifton so that they could stay abreast of new trends in teaching the poorly motivated academic student and could at the same time renew themselves in an academic setting away from their own campus, for they are the ones who must work with short attention spans, students who become easily bored, and students with weak social and

communication skills.

Here, however, is where volunteers from the law firm of Piper and Marbury truly came to the rescue. Acting as mentors instead of teachers or tutors, thirty attorneys from this firm addressed the need for new verbal and social skills by participating in weekly sessions with the students, showing them how to be more expressive, how to communicate in more acceptable speech patterns, how to develop vocabulary, and how to argue a case or critique a live theatre production. If this college-school partnership is beginning to develop any expertise in reaching the academic at-risk student, part of it lies in knowing when to call on outside professionals for help.

We don't pretend to have the answers, but over the last four years, the partnership has begun to ask some of the right questions, questions that reveal how necessary it is to build a world of expectations and dreams for students living in neighborhoods where at times even the police are leery to go and how important it is to show these same students what a college education means, what a career is, and how minority students before them have managed to succeed. If the late 80s are any indication of where we are going in the 90s, college-school partnerships such as ours seem to be part of the pedagogical landscape that many of us will traverse. Because the implications for English departments in both the university and the high school are serious ones, it is important that none of us be taken by surprise or feel the need to reinvent the wheel.

But even more important for the students is learning that there are people who stand behind them--pushing them to do what needs to be done, demanding everyday work, praising them for work well done, and depending on them to make their own dreams come true. I am reminded of Langston Hughes's question in his poem "Harlem,"--"What happens to a dream deferred?" If Oscar Jobe, Bob Bonnell, Nathaniel McFadden, if the teachers at Lake Clifton and the professors at Morgan State, if the student tutors, the community businessmen, the Piper and Marbury lawyers, and the role models (ranging from bank vice presidents to ROTC officers who have come to talk to the students) have their way, the dream will not "dry up like a raisin in the sun," nor "fester like a sore and then run," nor "sag like a heavy load" or "explode." Rather, these young people should be finishing their first year in college at this time next year, and they should have learned that with the support of both black and white people, their dream, again as Langston Hughes wrote, is still "in front of them, bright as a sun."

Valerie F. Sedlak